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Letter dated 18 July 2017 from the Permanent Representatives of Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Sweden and Uruguay, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, hereby share a summary note of the meeting held on 4 May 2017 on women and peace and security in Mali (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Olof **Skoog**
Ambassador

(*Signed*) Matthew **Rycroft**
Ambassador

(*Signed*) Elbio **Rosselli**
Ambassador

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Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security

Summary of the meeting on Mali, 4 May 2017

On 4 May, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security held its third meeting, on women and peace and security in Mali. The members received a briefing from the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and United Nations Resident Coordinator, Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Representative for Mali, senior representatives of the civilian and military components of MINUSMA and representatives of agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system.

The members noted the strong commitment of the Mission's leadership to the issue of women and peace and security, but were particularly interested in whether the low numbers of women within the Mission and the significant unfilled vacancies in the Gender Affairs Advisory Unit affected the Mission's ability to conduct gender and conflict analysis. Members noted the increase in incidents of sexual and gender-based violence between 2015 and 2016, but also the comparatively lower rates of conflict-related sexual violence, which might be attributable to underreporting.

While there were important gains in the representation of women in the local elections and the conference for national harmony, their participation in the bodies tasked with implementing the peace agreement and the recently appointed interim authorities remained extremely limited. The briefers noted that the United Nations was engaged in high-level advocacy to address that gap and welcomed the support and influence of the Security Council on the matter. The Mission's leadership pointed out that, while the representation of women in the interim authorities in the north was dismal, the positions there were temporary and would be coming up for election in a few months, meaning that there would be opportunities to build on the relative success in terms of the participation of women in the local elections and to implement the 30 per cent quota for women. The Mission, in partnership with the United Nations country team, had recently trained more than 400 women candidates and was working to ensure that women's views were adequately represented in the constitutional review process. Women had accounted for more than 30 per cent of the participants at the conference for national harmony. The United Nations was working closely with the Ombudsman of Mali, who chaired the process, and the final document of the conference contained direct references to women's rights, priorities and economic concerns.

With regard to the implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security, briefers highlighted the Government's innovative approach, with a coordination unit located within the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family, a plan by each government entity as to how it would contribute to its implementation and a basket fund to mobilize resources, but expressed concern that only $1 million in catalytic funding had been received to date to cover the $20 million budget.

Briefers reaffirmed that the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda concerned the entire Mission, encompassing the civilian, military

and police components, and the United Nations country team. They noted, however, the low representation of women in MINUSMA: 27 per cent of international civilian staff, 19 per cent of national civilian staff, 34 per cent of United Nations volunteers, less than 7 per cent of police personnel and less than 2 per cent of military personnel. The importance of increasing the numbers of women in the military and police components was reiterated, with it being noted that higher percentages would dramatically increase the Mission's ability to implement its mandate, engage with local populations and improve security. The military component noted the deployment in the past six months of military gender advisers in headquarters and the sectors, advocating an increased number of female military officers in the field.

The representative of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict raised the issue that the draft joint communiqué with the Government had yet to be finalized and signed, notwithstanding the sustained advocacy by the Mission's leadership, the Senior Women's Protection Adviser and the Human Rights Division. One of the signatory parties, the Platform, had signed a unilateral communiqué on preventing sexual violence in conflict and, in March, a signatory coalition armed group, the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad, signed an action plan with the United Nations to end the recruitment and use of and sexual violence against children. The Mission was continuing its monitoring and dialogue with the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights on follow-up to cases of conflict-related sexual violence during the peak of the conflict, in 2012 and 2013, but the state of the judiciary and the lack of security were an impediment to beginning trials. Participants attributed the overall rise in the number of incidents of sexual and gender-based violence to increased reporting of incidents elsewhere in the country, other than in the north alone, a trend that was expected to continue in 2017 and underscored the need for services for survivors. The Organization was working to ensure that the new gender-based violence law addressed conflict-related sexual violence, female genital mutilation and child marriage, including by engaging with local champions, from parliamentarians to religious and traditional leaders.

The representative of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women welcomed the access by the Security Council to better information and analysis on women and peace and security issues in Mali, through both the Informal Expert Group and greater attention and specificity being devoted to women and peace and security in the Mission's quarterly reports to the Council, expressing the hope that that would also be evident in the Council's briefings and consultations.

Recommendations by the participants and the secretariat of the Group included:

(a) Ensure that, in its upcoming resolution to renew the mandate of MINUSMA, the Security Council will:

(i) Maintain the strong language on gender equality, women's rights and leadership and conflict-related sexual violence that was adopted in the previous year's resolution;

(ii) Express regret at the continued exclusion of women from the bodies tasked with implementing and monitoring the peace agreement, as well as the interim authorities appointed in the conflict-affected regions;

(iii) Welcome the gains in political representation of women and participation in elections and efforts to implement the gender quota adopted in 2015;

(iv) Call upon donors to increase funding for services for survivors of gender-based violence and the implementation of the national action plan on

women and peace and security, including specific interventions to improve access by women to justice and the capacity of rule of law institutions;

(b) Encourage troop-contributing countries to match their national averages in terms of the representation of women in the military and police when deploying troops to MINUSMA. Council members and troop-contributing countries should further discuss the representation of women at the force generation conference to be held on 22 May;

(c) That MINUSMA should develop and implement an action plan to ensure increased recruitment of women to the Mission. Considering the strong commitment of the Secretary-General to gender parity, MINUSMA should ensure full use of the tools offered by Headquarters to ensure increased representation in senior positions;

(d) That engagement with the Malian authorities should continue to advocate the finalization and signing of the joint communiqué on conflict-related sexual violence, putting in place a comprehensive and multisectoral strategy on the matter. In addition, any national strategy to counter violent extremism must address sexual violence, and victims of sexual violence perpetrated by extremist groups should be recognized as victims of terrorism.

The Co-Chairs expressed thanks to MINUSMA and the United Nations country team in Mali for participating in the meeting and committed themselves to following up on the recommendations and meeting again in 2018.